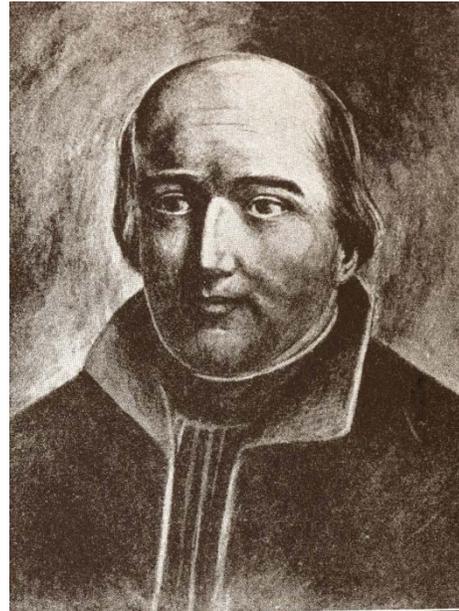


Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the legislative session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

March 16, 2011

THIS WEEK: Marquette's account of the discovery of the Upper Mississippi

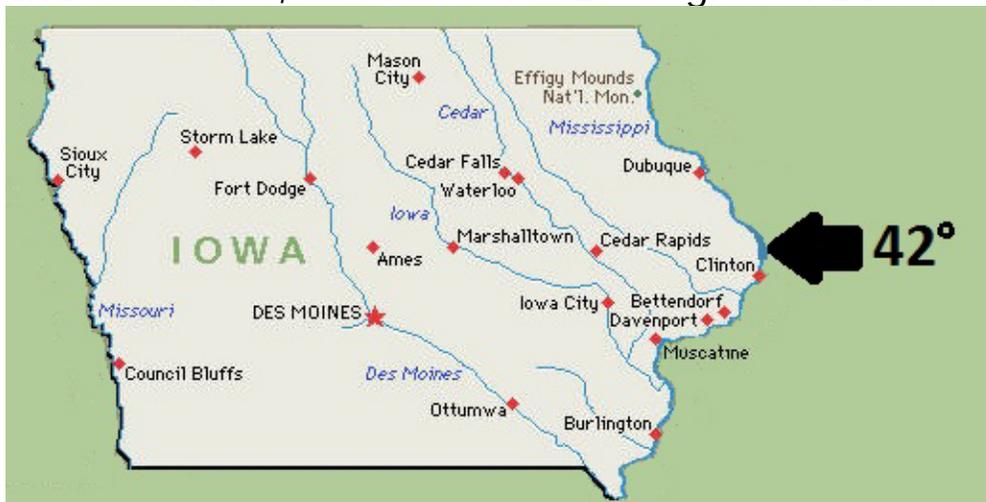
BACKGROUND: Father **Jacques Marquette**, sometimes known as *Père Marquette*, was a [French Jesuit missionary](#) who founded [Michigan's](#) first European settlement, [Sault Ste. Marie](#), and later founded St. Ignace, Michigan. In 1673, Father Marquette and [Louis Jolliet](#) were the first [Europeans](#) to see and map the northern portion of the [Mississippi River](#).



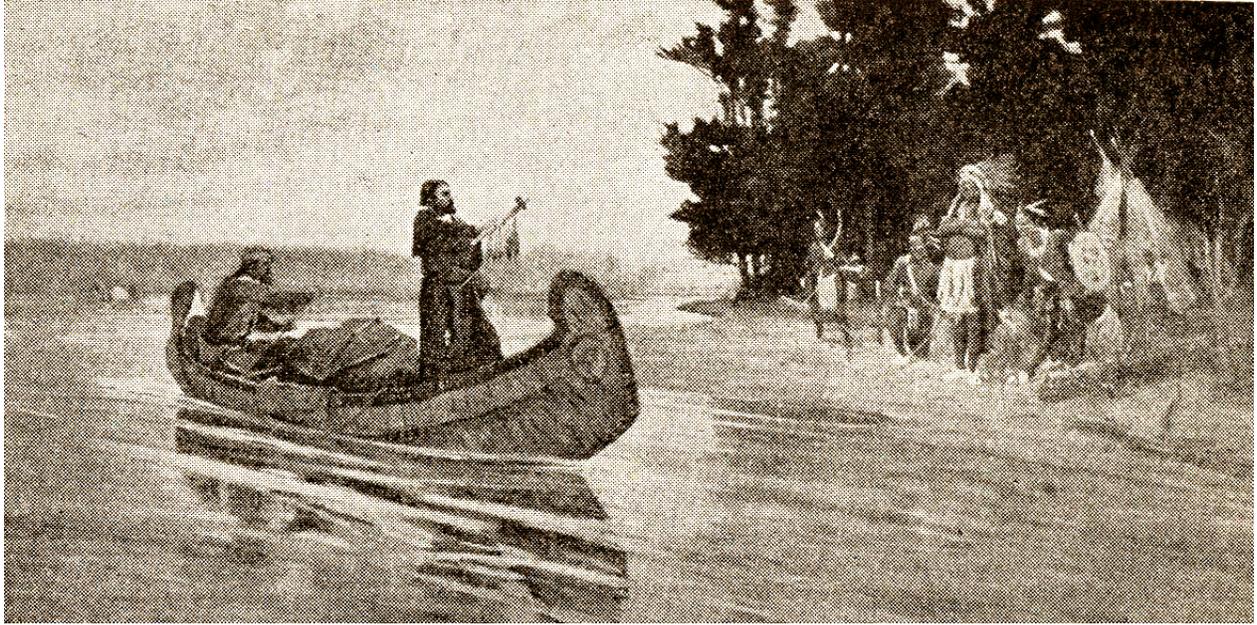
Father Jacques Marquette
(b. June 10, 1637 – d. May 18, 1675)
(Picture—Iowa State Historical Society)

**Brief extract from Marquette's journal
June 17, 1673**

Here we are, then, on the renowned River, all of whose peculiar features I have endeavored to note carefully. The Mississippi River takes its rise in various lakes in the country of the Northern nations. It is narrow at the place where the Miskous [Meskousing or Wisconsin] empties; its Current, which flows southward, is slow and gentle. To the right is a large Chain of very high Mountains, and to the left are beautiful lands; in various Places, the stream is Divided by Islands. On sounding, we found ten brasses of Water. Its Width is very unequal; sometimes it is three-quarters of a league, and sometimes it narrows to three arpents. We gently followed its Course, which runs toward the south and southwest, as far as the 42nd degree of Latitude.



Here we plainly saw that its aspect was completely changed. There are hardly any woods or mountains; The Islands are more beautiful, and are Covered with finer trees. We saw only deer and cattle, bustards, and Swans without wings, because they drop Their plumage in This country. From time to time, we came upon a monstrous fish, one of which struck our Canoe with such violence that I Thought that it was a great tree, about to break the Canoe to pieces. On another occasion, we saw on The water, a monster with the head of a tiger, a sharp nose Like That of a wildcat, with whiskers and straight Erect ears; The head was gray and The Neck quite black; but We saw no more creatures of this sort.



Joliet and Marquette descending the Mississippi

(From a painting by O.E. Berninghaus) (State Historical Society of Missouri)

We call them "wild cattle," because they are similar to our domestic cattle. They are not longer, but are nearly as large again, and more Corpulent. When Our people killed one, three persons had much difficulty in moving it. The head is very large; The forehead is flat, and a foot and a half Wide between the Horns, which are exactly like Those of our oxen, but black and much larger. Under the Neck They have a Sort of large dewlap, which hangs down; and on The back is a rather high hump. The whole of the head, The Neck , and a portion of the Shoulders, are Covered with a thick Mane Like That of horses; It forms a crest a foot long, which makes them hideous, and, falling over their eyes, Prevents them from seeing what is before Them. The remainder of the Body is covered with a heavy coat of curly hair, almost Like That of our sheep, but much stronger and Thicker. It falls off in Summer, and becomes as soft As Velvet. At that season, the savages Use the hides for making fine Robes, which they paint in various Colors. The flesh and the fat of the pisikious are Excellent, and constitute the best dish at feasts. Moreover, they are very fierce; and not a year passes without their killing some savages. When attacked, they catch a man on their Horns, if they can, toss Him in the air, and then throw him on the ground, after

which they trample him underfoot, and kill him. If a person fire at Them from a distance, with either a bow or a gun, he must, immediately after the Shot, throw himself down and hide in the grass; For if they perceive Him who has fired, they Run at him, and attack him. As their legs are thick and rather Short, they do not run very fast, As a rule, except when angry. They are scattered about the prairie in herds; I have seen one of 400.

From *The Story of Iowa: The Progress of an American State*, by William J. Petersen, Vol. 1, Copyright 1952, Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., New York